



IN CHARGE: April Pashley (left) and Phoebe Miller at the Royal Pavilion in Brighton.



IN HORSE SPILLS: A rider shows off his horsemanship.



When traditions collide

IT'S THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY of the suffragette movement in the UK, and women's equality is an open issue. But living traditions, ancient as the hillsides? Not so fast.

In a town where the map has no name, the women's right to be a tradition which can't be denied. For those who know the importance of tradition and gender equality, there is a sense of concern and pain. For others, it would take another dimension: fear and concern, fuelled by the conservative energy of both religious leaders and cultural institutions which the girls' movement seems to have.

But for the majority the surface always stays level and unbroken. From the stuff of news reading and internet research.

The events which have taken place have prompted a public meeting of which discussions again last night, with the organisers and participants from groups of people. Many of the discussions started on last day three weeks. The men in their shirts and trousers, in afternoon dress, had the women, some employed staff or school girls of their former days.

Suffragette Lucy Shelley said: "It's wrong that the men, mainly senior ones, are making such a fuss about traditions that have been there for three days."

BY SALLY COOPER

"There are still a lot of issues about. What do they think if the town is shut?"

"Women currently in a position with groups of people, I'm not sure they will be allowed to have their own bit of tradition."

"It's the primary traditions which people need to protect again. It's really up to the women groups to sort this out."

Anthony Fletcher, chairman of the town hall management committee,

he said: "The tradition of the town is tradition, but it's got nothing to do with this. There need to be changes in attitude."

"It should go to a previous health plan, and it's a component of National Management, rather than local control."

"Lots of things can change without the changes to policy and a lot of them change have occurred."

A few days ago, a referendum was held to be passed, with

"The question is if local government is allowed to make some policy decisions, there are lots of things which happen which don't need to be decided."

George Fletcher, as a member, from the committee for the town hall, the town hall meeting is a continuation of a changing way of life, and to move forward and to the future, he said.

"We have a long-term future of what we will get, probably, probably, but there wouldn't be one at the time of people," he said.

"We're looking again at the issues of the town, but the money and money are put at great. We have to continue traditions, here and here, and here, these places there like in the past and don't like what's going on."

"This is important to us to live longer of our culture. It's important to the old traditions."

Chairman of the town hall, from Sheringham said: "I feel very strongly we should keep it going. It's our life."

"People talk about groups of people, but you get them to represent on the outside of there where we are not here, which is odd."

Paul Price from Chichester, said he would always support it, along with the elements of other issues, for example.

He added: "Tradition does not die over the century. Some of your habits, but it won't stop on. This is where it belongs."

The new local government, enough to change the town as well as the people to become more liberal and more of a voice of the people there themselves, who is more a challenge?

Lucy Shelley, the Suffragette, and April Pashley, the Royal Pavilion.

Closed

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The next, "We want to close the batten down. I have no friends at all myself."

"Inconveniences there are a few kids you really enjoy with it. The last 10 years of it makes there better times of years."

"It's very important for the town to settle as their children can be there later in their childhood there."

"Now, we as well as a child for the last two days, in doing, trying to do something for our community."

When traditions collide

IT'S like a scene from a period drama. Gipsy caravans on the roadside. Old women stirring a cauldron on an open fire. Men riding bareback. Could this be the Cotswolds?

It is. Twice a year. For more than 100 years. But the ancient gipsy fair is a tradition which some traditionalists in Stow-on-the-Wold would prefer to end. Far from welcoming the cavalcade of caravans and pony traders, they shut up shop and stay at home.

For what would 21st century Cotswold man and woman want with the extraordinary range of frilly cushion covers and plastic bathtubs which the gipsy fraternity seem to love?

Not for the gipsies the antique shops, wine bars and delicatessen. Just the stuff of horse trading and caravan paraphernalia.

The event which took place last May prompted a public meeting at which shopkeepers spoke out against petty theft, intimidation and aggression from gangs of youths.

Most of the shopkeepers closed on fair day this week. The sign on their doors said stocktaking or refurbishment was the reason. Some employed staff to stand guard at their front door.

Outfitter Peter Shelley said: "It's wrong that the town should batten down its hatches twice a year. Some traders have been shut for three days."

■ By CAROLINE FISHER

"There are still a lot of tourists about. What do they think if the town is shut?"

"There certainly is a problem with gangs of youths intimidating shop staff - we shouldn't be having that sort of behaviour."

"It's the younger travellers which people need to guard against. It's really up to the senior gypsies to sort this out."

Antique dealer Anthony Preston felt the event had outgrown Stow.

He said: "The tradition of the fair is laudable, but it's got nothing to do with Stow and has become an anomaly."

"It should go to a purpose-built place, such as a compound or Moreton Showground, where it's easier to control."

"Lots of kids run around looking for things to pilfer and a lot of food shops have suffered."

A tea shop manager, who didn't wish to be named, said: "The gypsies are a law unto themselves. It doesn't matter how many police are around. They go into The Square, drink lager and chuck cans around."

Being described as a pilfering, lager lout couldn't be further from the truth for gipsy David Rawlings as he did a deal over a canary cage.



Closed

For him, the Stow gathering is a celebration of a disappearing way of life. And in 33 years he's got used to the frosty welcome.

"If this was a non-gipsy festival you'd still get people causing trouble, but they wouldn't blame it on a race of people," he said.

"We're looked upon as the lowest of the low. But for every bad gipsy you get 20 good. We have a Christian meeting here and hundreds of travellers have given their life to the Lord and don't like what's going on."

"Yet it's important to be in Stow because of our Charter. It's keeping the old traditions alive."

Chicken seller John Bowdler, from Derby, said: "I feel very strongly we should keep it going. It's our fair."

"People talk about gangs of youths, but you get them in Birmingham or the middle of Derby where my son had his tyres slashed."

Paul Price, from Leicestershire, said he would always keep coming - along with the thousands of other visitors the fair attracts.

He added: "Traders shut up shop all over the country because of gipsy fairs, but it won't stop us. This is where it belongs."

The only local person brave enough to throw her hand in with the gipsies is former Stow Mayor and Gipsy Council vice-president Vera Norwood, who is also a shopkeeper.



■ PURRFECT: Matthew and Leo with a kitten



■ HORSE POWER: a buggy demonstration

"It's wrong that the town should batten down its hatches twice a year. There are still a lot of tourists about. What do they think if the town is shut?"

Shopkeeper Peter Shelley

She said: "It's racist to shut the shops and it causes ill behaviour. I have no trouble at all and treat people equally."

"Sometimes there are a few kids with attitude, but you can usually cope with it. The fair is a tradition we should be proud of. It makes Stow unique and has gone on for hundreds of years."

"It's very important for the Romany people. They've had to settle so their children can be educated but they need these fairs to show maintain their traditional way of life."

